

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02652 011210Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-08 TRSE-00 OMB-01 COME-00
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: XC, CE, ECIN

SUBJ: SRI LANKA INTEREST IN ASEAN MEMBERSHIP

1. SUMMARY: PRESS SPECULATION OVER THE WEEKEND, APPARENTLY
INSPIRED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, SUGGESTS THAT SRI LANKA
IS GIVING SERIOUS THOUGHT TO AN APPLICATION TO JOIN ASEAN.
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A SENIOR GSL OFFICIAL PRIVATELY CONFIRMED THIS. END SUMMARY.

2. LOCAL RUMORS THAT THE NEW UNP GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE SERIOUSLY
INTERESTED IN A BID TO JOIN ASEAN BURST FORTH IN WHAT APPEARED
TO BE AN ORCHESTRATED EFFORT IN THE SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS ON JULY
31. SIMILAR STORIES, PERHAPS BASED ON A FOREIGN MINISTRY BACK-
GROUNDER, INDICATED THAT THE MATTER WAS UNDER SERIOUS STUDY

BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. REFERENCE WAS MADE TO A STATEMENT BY PHILIPPINES FOREIGN SECRETARY, GENERAL CARLOS P. ROMULO, IN MANILA ON JULY 27 TO THE EFFECT THAT ASEAN WAS NOT A POLITICAL GROUPING AND THAT THE PHILIPPINES, FOR ONE, WOULD BE PREPARED TO BACK SRI LANKA'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE GROUP.

3. FOREIGN MINISTER A.C.S. HAMEED TOLD A REPORTED THAT SRI LANKA'S FUTURE FOREIGN POLICY WOULD PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION, AND THAT THIS COULD BE MORE EFFECTIVELY ACHIEVED BY BRINGING ASIAN COUNTRIES CLOSER. HE ADDED THAT IN ALMOST ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD THERE APPEARED TO BE SOME FORM OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROUPING, EXCEPT "IN OUR ZONE", AND THAT THIS IS A TRAGEDY FOR THE WHOLE OF ASIA.

4. IN EDITORIAL COMMENT, PRO-UNP WEEKEND (SUN GROUP), CITED POSSIBLE ROLE FOR SRI LANKA AS MEDIATING AGENT BETWEEN ASEAN COUNTRIES AND INDOCHINESE NEIGHBORS, GIVEN SRI LANKA'S NON-ALIGNED CREDITALS. COMING ASEAN SUMMIT WITH EMPHASIS ON INTENSIFIED ECONOMIC COOPERATION WILL HELP TO MAKE ASEAN "THE NEW MIRACLE FOR ASIA FOR THIS DECADE," WITH BETTER ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH CHINA, EEC, ETC. GENERAL ROMULO IS AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN HIS OWN RIGHT AND A VALUABLE SPONSOR. A LINK WITH ASEAN WOULD TIE IN WITH THE UNP GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO ESTABLISH A FREE TRADE ZONE HERE. WEEKEND EDITORIAL SUGGESTS GSL SEEK OBSERVER STATUS AT THIS WEEK'S ASEAN SUMMIT AS A STEP TOWARDS CLOSER TIES.

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5. LESS PRO-GOVERNMENT SUNDAY TIMES, WITH TIES TO BANDARANAIKE FAMILY, GENERALLY OPPOSES A MOVE TOWARD ASEAN AND SUGGESTS SRI LANKA SEEK ECONOMIC COOPERATION "WITHIN OUR OWN IMMEDIATE REGION", MEANING PAKISTAN AND INDIA.

6. ADDITIONAL PLANNING SECRETARY LEELANANDA DE SILVA TOLD CHARGE THAT AN ASEAN MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION IS INDEED A SERIOUS POSSIBILITY. HE SAID THERE WERE THOSE IN SRI LANKA WHO HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT SRI LANKA SHOULD HAVE AN ASSOCIATION WITH SOME OTHER GROUPING AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE RATHER OVERWHELMING PRESENCE OF ITS INDIAN NEIGHBOR. HOWEVER, SUCH AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONNECTION HAD NOT BEEN POSSIBLE WHILE ASEAN WAS TAKING AN ANTI-CHINESE POSITION AND WHILE THE INDOCHINESE CONFLICT WAS STILL RAGING. NOW IT SEEMS THAT ASEAN COUNTRIES ARE SEEKING BETTER RELATIONS NOT ONLY WITH CHINA BUT ALSO WITH THEIR INDOCHINESE NEIGHBORS AND THAT IT IS BECOMING AN ORGANIZATION WITH A GREATER EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC QUESTIONS, WHICH IS MORE TO SRI LANKA'S LIKING.

7. COMMENT: IT MIGHT BE RECALLED THAT PRIME MINISTER J.R. JAYEWARDENE LIKES TO CONSIDER HIMSELF AS THE FATHER OF THE

COLOMBO PLAN AND A LIFELONG ADVOCATE OF GREATER REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION. AN ASEAN CONNECTION WOULD ALSO BALANCE HIS PREDECESSOR'S MAJOR PREOCCUPATION WITH THE POLITICS OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT. IT IS TOO EARLY FOR US TO TELL TO WHAT EXTENT THIS FLURRY OF PRESS SPECULATION REPRESENTS A TRIAL BALLOON BY A VERY NEW AND INEXPERIENCED GOVERNMENT. ONE WOULD ASSUME THAT A DECISION TO APPLY FOR FORMAL ASSOCIATION WOULD REQUIRE STUDY OVER A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME. NEVERTHELESS, WE WOULD BE MOST INTERESTED IN ANY ECHOES FROM THE ASEAN CAPITALS OF THIS PROPOSAL.
PERKINS

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